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I Don't Think the System Works: The Politics of Anakin Skywalker

by ami-padme

There are countless ways to explain Anakin Skywalker's fall from grace during the *Star Wars* saga. Issues of temptation and morality, of loss and anger, of impatience and a desire for power all play large roles in the character's turn to the Dark Side. Another issue, connected to those mentioned but still distinct, also has a significant impact on Anakin's journey from an innocent child and noble Jedi to a Sith second-in-command of a tyrannical galactic regime. That issue is Anakin's personal politics – how they developed through his childhood, made him more susceptible to the frustrations of dealing with a troubled democracy in the Galactic Republic, and eventually led him to accepting the idea of the superiority of an Empire.

The circumstances that shaped Anakin's political thinking throughout the prequels and the beliefs drawn from them follow, in several ways, the political theories and thinking of the classical Greek philosopher, Plato. Throughout his works, Plato speaks to the idea that chaos and anarchy inevitably lead to tyranny, expresses concerns about democracy as an effective political system, and advocates an ideal type of aristocratic political leadership. Anakin's politics, a significant piece of the character's journey, are set against a backdrop of fictional governments in a galaxy far, far away, yet still reflect parts of the classical political philosophy of Ancient Greece that Plato espoused.

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Anakin Skywalker's childhood on Tatooine has an enormous and critical influence on his political thinking. Tatooine is essentially a lawless planet, close to anarchy. Controlled by the criminal Hutts during the time of *The Phantom Menace*, the Outer Rim planet practices slavery, is a "[haven] for those who don't wish to be found," and is beyond the reach of the laws and customs of the Republic. Anakin is raised in this environment as a slave, with no freedom; what little security and stability he has is tied to the whims – and sporting bets – of his masters.

The dangerous and volatile nature of Tatooine creates in Anakin a desire for both order and control on a personal level. On a larger, political level, he would have the same priorities, making his future connections between an honorable wish to establish order and seeing the benefits of an Empire (even an oppressive one) more understandable. It is easy to make the connection between wanting to impose order and finding the benefit in an Empire; even when the desire for order comes out of a considerate impulse to provide safety and justice to the population, and even when that Empire is oppressive. In *The Republic*, Plato states, "the truth [is] that the excessive increase of anything often causes a reaction in the opposite direction; and this is the case not only in the seasons and in vegetable and animal life, but above all in forms of government."[1] He specifically addresses the reaction to chaos and anarchy, which he believes is the result of immoderate freedom granted to the population: "The excess of liberty, whether in States or individuals, seems only to pass into excess of slavery…the most aggravated form of tyranny and slavery [arises] out of the most extreme form of liberty."[2] Anakin's character, who in part reacts to an early life on Tatooine by later becoming a representative of an repressive regime, personifies this aspect of Plato's political theory.

A childhood on Tatooine also taught Anakin several negative lessons about the efficacy and integrity of the democratic Galactic Republic. However aware he may or may not have been of the galaxy beyond

the Outer Rim as a small child, by the events of Episode I, at least, he is certainly made aware of several troubling facts. "The Republic doesn't exist out here," his mother tells Padmé, and she's right – ostensibly, the Republic has outlawed slavery, but seems powerless to halt the practice on Tatooine. Criminals and other outcasts from the civilized galaxy come to the desert world to hide, and often to continue their illegal and immoral activities; the Republic is unable to capture or stop them. Even when its representatives, like Jedi Qui-Gon Jinn or Queen Amidala, come face-to-face with Tatooine's problems, there is no expectation that the Republic will take any meaningful action to rectify the situation. Seeing the failures of the Republic in such personal terms on a daily basis no doubt influenced the way Anakin looked at the galactic government, and at the concept of democracy in general. The book, *Plato: Totalitarian or Democrat?*, speaks of the political atmosphere that Plato was raised in, one where the failures of democracy were also on display. "Democracy was only another name for corruption and class-politics," says one of the book's essays, and the philosopher, "heard the savage jeers…at the inefficiency and vulgarity of the jingo democrats."[3] Plato went on to support an aristocratic revolution, and it comes as no surprise that Anakin supported a revolutionary overthrow of democracy himself.

After leaving his homeworld in *The Phantom Menace*, Anakin is raised within the Jedi Order, which is centered at the heart of the Republic on Coruscant. Here, the experiences and beliefs that marked his childhood on Tatooine are reinforced by the deteriorating state of the galaxy, and its government. This decline continues throughout the remainder of the prequel era.

While the Republic is still functioning during the time of *Attack of the Clones*, its slow slide into irrelevancy, chaos, and war continues. Anakin shares his thoughts on politics, government, and the current state of affairs when prompted by Padmé Naberrie. He doesn't "think the system works" and wants to change things so that all the politicians can gather, decide what course of action would best serve their people, and then follow that course of action. Anakin is neither a tyrant nor despot by nature; he wants what's best for the populace, and is frustrated by the inability of the Senate to provide that. For Anakin, the results – getting what needs to be done, done – are more important than the rules, laws, or the process of democracy, especially as he sees that process continually weakening to the people's detriment. He would rather "someone wise" take charge to "make [the politicians] agree" than allow the problems of the galaxy to continue when the government, he believes, has the means to end them.

The idea of "someone wise" having the final authority – over other politicians, over the political process itself – to do the right things and to take necessary actions is similar to Plato's thoughts on the ideal political leader. In the dialogue *Politicus*, Plato says, "Provided that the ruler possesses the art of ruling, he should be free to adapt the laws to his knowledge of the Good."[4] In R.M. Hare's book, *Plato*, it is posited that "Plato thinks the rulers ought not themselves to be bound by the laws, but should be able to alter them ad hoc to fit individual cases, just as a doctor fits his treatment to the condition of each patient," and further, "any attempt to lay down laws by which the rulers themselves were to be bound would lead to an inability to suit measures to particular cases."[5] Plato wants someone "neither pleasure-seeking nor ambitious" but "a true philosopher, alone qualified to rule through his knowledge of the Good."[6] Both he and Anakin, if able to find such a person, would turn over control of the state to them, and feel they have done a measurably positive thing in saving the people from the problems and difficulties found in an often slow-moving democratic system. Unfortunately, both men were disappointed in the "someone wise" they chose to support.

Plato: Totalitarian or Democrat? describes Plato's distress at the inability of those he backed during the aristocratic revolution to fix the problems of the democratic regime: "Up till now he had assumed that everything could be put right only if the gentlemen gained control. Now he realized that 'gentlemen'

could behave worse than the demagogues of the proletariat."[7] Plato himself, in letters written long after the fact laments, "I thought the new regime would substitute the reign of justice for the reign of injustice…And I saw these gentlemen within a very short time make the democracy they had destroyed seem like a golden age!"[8] Likewise, by the time of the Original Trilogy, we find Darth Vader disillusioned with the Empire and actively working to overthrow Emperor Palpatine. He still holds to the same political priorities that he has had since childhood; in trying to convince his son Luke to turn to the Dark Side and join him, Vader tells him, among other things, "Together, we can end this destructive conflict, and bring order to the galaxy." He still values bringing an end to chaos, still believes that a strong person – the right person – can do what is needed for the good of the Empire. But he no longer believes that Palpatine is that person, or that the Empire has effectively governed (or dealt appropriately with the ongoing war against the Alliance). Eventually, as Anakin's moral compass guides him back to the Light, he finally rejects both the Emperor and his Empire. There are many other, and more important, reasons why Vader killed the Emperor, but in the context of the political impact, it is significant that the act is not part of a coup where he and Luke would take over control of the Empire, but instead is a redemptive act that destroys the oppressive government and allows freedom to reign again throughout the Galaxy.

The manner in which Anakin Skywalker's experiences influenced his political beliefs, and the way those beliefs influenced the path his life took are a critical part of understanding his character, his fall, and eventual redemption.

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[2] Plato, 106.

[3] Thomas Landon Thorson, ed. *Plato: Totalitarian or Democrat?* Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1963, 17.

[4] Hare, R.M. *Plato*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982, 60-61.

[5] Hare, 60.

[6] Hare, 60.

[7] Thorson, 19.

[8] Thorson, 17.

But It's A Whole Nother Year!
Star Wars as A Seasonal Nature Myth
by FernWithy

One of the hallmarks of a mythic story is its sense of timelessness – of being both long over and perpetually happening. When the story is shared in a community, those hearing it are both learning an ancient tale and participating in it. Perhaps the clearest example of this timelessness is the cycle of seasonal celebrations, with their attendant myths – the death of light and its rekindling at (or near) the winter solstice, the spring rites of renewal, the harvest rites of autumn as the world prepares for winter again. The stories are told in a cycle of narrative, ending only to return to the beginning.

The *Star Wars* narrative fits the seasonal pattern well, beginning in fulsome summer, descending into fiery autumn and barren winter, and finally emerging again in a delicate and joyous spring. Even the release order suggests a cyclical myth – beginning in the middle of the story and cycling back around to the beginning.

But what of the question of *Star Wars* as a myth of morals and self-discovery? It is clearly a morality tale on one level – a cautionary story about the dangers of greed and rage, and a hopeful tale of the virtues of compassion and forgiveness. It is also certainly a coming of age story and a traditional hero's quest for identity. This essay does not dispute either point. To the mythic mindset, however, it is not an either/or question – our morality is reflected in the structures of the natural world, and the cycles of nature hold lessons about the nature of mankind. Thus the celebration of Christmas from Christians is simultaneously a celebration of the return of light to the physical world, the celebration of the perceived historical event of the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, and a theological reminder of the "dawn of redeeming grace." Likewise, the Jewish celebration of Passover brings in the renewing green herbs of springtime, recalls the defining event of the liberation from bondage in Egypt, and asks celebrants to consider the question of how we are still bound and redeemed each day.

There are of course no rituals or ceremonies to mark the seasons of the *Star Wars* myth, no designated holidays or traditional foods to be brought out as the seasons come upon us (though of course individual fans may in fact be prone to creating rituals). Divorced from the ritual of practiced religion, the *Star Wars* text itself becomes the celebration, where, as Joseph Campbell wrote, "The wonderful cycle of the year, with its hardships and periods of joy, is celebrated, and delineated, and represented as continued in the life-round of the human group."[1]

The Classic trilogy opens in the dead of winter, the height of the Empire. Its colors are harsh blacks and whites, its landscapes – with the exception of the Rebel Base – barren. Tatooine may be filled with sunlight, but it is a cruel sun that leaves dried bones on the horizon instead of drawing up life from the soil. The watery, temperate-looking world of Alderaan is seen only as it is destroyed. Drab green is as colorful as things get in the Empire, and in the galaxy it has created in its own image. The galaxy lies dormant under an icy heel. By the beginning of *The Empire Strikes Back*, even the rebels are snowbound.

And yet, in the tradition of the Solstice, it is in this darkness that we first see a glimmer of hope (as Episode IV was, in fact, re-titled, *A New Hope*). When we meet Luke he is engaged in moisture farming – trying to bring water and life back to the barren land. The longest night of the year also marks the beginning of the lengthening days, the brightening of the world as it moves toward spring.

In the course of the story, Luke goes to a watery world – a dark, nighttime version of the swamps which gave (will give?) aid to his mother on Naboo, another cyclical allusion. While he is there, he descends briefly into the underworld and gets a piece of information that changes everything, then returns to the world of the sky (Cloud City), where he learns its meaning – he has encountered mother and father, water and air. He emerges from the encounter decisively changed, and the galaxy is ready to change with him.

Luke [goes] deep into the underworld and [redeems] his father... Life has indeed been brought back.

Return of the Jedi marks the return of springtime. Winter still holds sway within the Empire, though even there the scarlet robes of the Emperor's Guard begin to provide a contrast. Most tellingly, the main action of *Jedi* takes place on the verdant moon of Endor, filmed in a forest of delicate shades of new green. The rebels, in camouflage for much of the movie, reflect this rising theme, while the Empire, powerful though it may be, is visually overwhelmed from the first glimpse of the bunker.

Although the movie again begins on seasonless Tatooine, it is no longer that Tatooine of stoic farmers and malfunctioning vaporators – it is the Tatooine of Jabba the Hutt, debauched and filthy, but deeply sensual. It is here that Leia brings her love back from the dead, the first of many spring symbols that appear in the movie.[2] After this prologue, the action moves to Endor, where we encounter not only the greens of the landscape, but the Ewoks, the first creatures in the saga shown in family groups that include infants and small children. Leia takes her hair down, a freeing of the feminine energy, which has been/will be destroyed in the course of the prequel trilogy's role in the cycle.

Most importantly, Luke repeats the theme of rescue and redemption by going deep into the underworld and redeeming his father, who has been enslaved there, and whose power will return balance to the Force. Significantly, this has traditionally been the role not of the son, but of the queen-consort. Ishtar seeks Tammuz, Isis seeks Osiris, and – not incidentally – Leia seeks Han. It is not unreasonable to see Luke in his role in *Return of the Jedi* as an avatar not of Anakin, but of Padmé, who presides over the "summer" of the saga.

As the Classic trilogy draws to a close, the characters are gathered on the forest moon, celebrating their victory with song, dance and fireworks. The stormtroopers' helmets are played as drums and pilots pantomime the stories of their daring escapes. As this is happening, Luke carries the mechanical shell of his father's body to the edge of the celebration, and burns it on a great pyre. The sparks meld back into the fireworks, and the fireworks into the galactic celebration.

This is very reminiscent of springtime rituals. James George Frazer, in The Golden Bough, reports that in parts of Bohemia, "they carry Death to the end of the village, singing...Behind the village they erect a pyre, on which they burn the straw figure, reviling and scoffing at it the while. Then they return, singing:

We have carried away Death
And brought Life back.
He has taken up his quarters in the village
Therefore sing joyous songs."[3]

Of course, when Luke himself returns to the village after carrying death away, he is welcomed by his joyful friends, and he looks across to see Yoda, Obi-Wan, and Anakin (young again in the DVD release)

looking on from the past, hovering over a green and misty world – a primeval beginning – as the joyous songs go on around him. Life has indeed been brought back.

When we rejoin the saga, time has been both pushed forward and rolled back. On the most obvious level, we find ourselves thirty-two years *before* the events of *A New Hope* have taken place, but seasonally, we are further along in the year.

The Phantom Menace is drenched in the bright, vibrant colors of summer. When we encounter Naboo, it is fresh and lush, a high and fertile summer with its young girl-queen/demigoddess as its symbol. Unlike Dagobah, the swamps of Naboo have clear water and bright skies. Even dusty, drab Tatooine is shot not as a barren place, but as a land of golden sand and cheerful sunlight. It is here that we meet the slave Anakin, who has great potential and is loved by powerful forces (the Jedi, Padmé). It is also, however, a fragile, temporary galaxy. The days are shortening; a major scene between Qui-Gon and Obi-Wan takes place in the red light of a gaudy Coruscant sunset. Threats are suppressed unnaturally, by a kind of willful blindness that keeps the good people battling phantoms while evil is taking root at the heart of the Republic. The bounty of the galaxy is barely held in check, and evil forces are ignored, in hiding rather than defeated. Like ancient kings trying to avoid the fulfillment of a prophecy – Acrisius hiding his daughter Danae so she wouldn't bear a son who would kill him, or Laius and Jocasta exposing the infant Oedipus on a mountaintop – they believe that they can preserve the status quo indefinitely. "This is a typical reaction of the old male energy," Victor MacGill writes of Acrisius. "...He thinks he can lock the problem away, but we cannot lock things away for ever in our unconscious world, just as the King could not keep Sleeping Beauty away from the spindle forever. Whatever is unnaturally controlled and suppressed will always find a way to reappear."[4]

By the time the saga moves on to *Attack of the Clones*, the color scheme has changed. There is more brown, more rust color. Autumn is in the air, just around the corner. Natural dangers are highlighted – the parasites Zam uses to attack Padmé, the violent storms on Kamino, the beasts in the arena. The romance comes to fullness here, in the waning days of summer, as autumn closes in. Patricia C. Wrede's juvenile novelization of the screenplay brings this into sharp focus with its final sentence, as Anakin kisses Padmé at their secret wedding, and she thinks, "There was only Anakin, and the scent of the dying roses in the garden below."[5]

Attack of the Clones marks the beginning of the season of death, with the bloody deaths of three women (Cordé the handmaiden, the bounty hunter Zam Wessell, and most prominently, Anakin's mother, Shmi Skywalker) heralding the end of the fertile summer.

As story moves inexorably toward Anakin's fall, another common harvest myth evoked – the dying god, who is killed and dismembered only to rise again with the crops in the spring. Like John Barleycorn of American legend, he is hacked apart a bit at a time. Perhaps the most famous of the dying gods, Tammuz (also known as Dumuzi and Adonis), was the consort of Ishtar (or, in the Greek take on the myth, Aphrodite). Each year, he was killed, and each year, the goddess descended into the underworld to retrieve him. While she was gone, she took the fertility of the Earth with her. While Anakin sojourns in the underworld, trapped in a modernistic version of a live burial, the galaxy again falls into winter, where we began, and the twins will be born of summer as the hope for spring to return.

Notes and Works Cited:

[1] Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*. (Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, USA). Second edition, 1968. Pg. 384.

[2] The imagery of Leia's rescue of Han is strikingly similar to the description of Isis finding her husband Osiris trapped in a casket after seeking him all day as a sparrow hawk. As related by Geraldine McCaughrean, "Her feet felt the beat of a heart through the inlaid lid. Not dead yet, then! Half mad with hope, she pecked furiously. Her beek made a hole. The soul of Osiris struggled like a flame through that hole and singed the fathers of the sparrow hawk!"

McCaughrean, Geraldine. *The Crystal Pool*. (Margaret K. McElderry Books, New York, 1998). Pg. 52.

[3] Frazer, Sir James George. *The Golden Bough*. (Macmillan, New York, 1922.) First Touchstone edition, 1996. Pg. 360.

[4] MacGill, Victor. "Perseus and Andromeda." *When the Dragon Stirs* (http://www.vmacgill.net/perseus.htm)

[5] Wrede, Patricia C. *Star Wars: Episode II: Attack of the Clones*. Based on the story by George Lucas and screenplay by George Lucas and Jonathan Hales. (Scholastic, New York, 2002). Pg. 167.

The Journey As Applied To The Adventures of Luke Skywalker: Special Edition

by lazypadawan

Foreword: *I originally wrote this paper in 1990 for a seminar-type class called the Mythic Image. It was originally called "The Journey As Applied To The Star Wars Trilogy" but now that the saga has expanded beyond one trilogy, I've retitled it and given it the "Special Edition" treatment.*

Everyone at one point in life must seek out an identity of his or her own if that person is to successfully pass from adolescence to adulthood. This psychological journey entails encountering fears and overcoming them, resisting material and spiritual temptations to stray away from the quest, gaining in experience and knowledge, and becoming in harmony with the forces of nature – good and bad – within yourself.

This process is extremely painful, since the adolescent must separate from all that is safe and familiar, especially the family. You are worthy of becoming a separate entity if you can withstand the pain of separation and initiation. Once you have completed initiation, the family structure changes to accept you as an adult and an equal worthy of respect.

Such is the psychological journey Luke Skywalker must endure over the course of Episodes IV-VI of the saga. At the very beginning of *A New Hope*, Luke is a total innocent trapped in a boring existence as a moisture farmer on a desolate, remote world. Outside of this small world, the whole galaxy is in turmoil over the war between the Empire and the Alliance. Luke knows nothing of the galaxy at large, not to mention what pure good or evil are. In this way he is like the Celtic hero Conneda; naive and powerless because he has not experienced anything outside of his own small existence.[1]

Luke dreams of leaving the moisture farm and taking off for the stars, much the way young boys dream of traveling the world. Luke's wish comes true, but in a way he does not expect. A holographic message from a mysterious young girl pleading for help (conveyed through R2D2) is his call to adventure.

It isn't until Artoo vanishes that Luke experiences his first trial. He goes out on his own from the homestead in order to retrieve the droid along with another droid that will become part of Luke's new family structure, Threepio. On this first adventure, Luke is attacked by Sand People, otherwise known as Tusken Raiders. This short scene makes the viewer aware that once Luke leaves the relative safety of his home he faces dangers and he faces pain. However, because he is inexperienced even in the shadow realms of his own world, he cannot save himself. He loses consciousness and is rescued by Obi-Wan "Ben" Kenobi, an old hermit who had once been a Jedi Knight and a hero in the Clone Wars.

In *Hero of a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell notes that the first encounter of the hero-journey is with "a protective figure (often a little old crone or an old man) who provides the adventurer with amulets against the dragon forces he is about to pass."[2] Obi-Wan is such a figure, who not only is the next link to Luke's past and future, he provides Luke with the skills he will need to survive the trials ahead of him, and he bestows upon him a talisman.

Luke learns from the old wise man where his true identity and his destiny lie. He learns his "dead" father wasn't a navigator on a freighter, but a Jedi Knight. He learns that the Jedi Knights were guardians of peace and justice in the millennia before the Empire, and that they had been wiped out. Luke for the first time has a connection to his past and through his father's identity as a Jedi, he is revealed to have a

greater potential than he had ever dreamed possible. And for the first time, Luke gains paternal role models who will guide him toward this potential: Obi-Wan and his biological father Anakin. Telemachus adopts his father Odysseus as a role model the same way, through second-hand information, since Odysseus had been gone for all of Telemachus's life. Unlike Telemachus, who had been raised an orphan alone with his mother Penelope, Luke already had a paternal figure in his Uncle Owen.[3] However, Owen is a threshold guardian, one who keeps the hero from advancing in his journey. It is not to say he is a villain. In fact, he provides Luke the moral upbringing and stability that aids him on his quest. But he is determined to shield Luke from his potential, perhaps out of fear the Empire will find Luke or that Luke will share the same fate as his father Anakin.

This initial meeting with Obi-Wan is the also the first time Luke learns about the Force, which Obi-Wan describes as an energy that "flows through all living things...it sustains us...and binds the galaxy together." There is a light side, which is the creative, benevolent side that is tempered with conscience and reason. The Jedi use the light side to defend and support life, not for random destruction or personal gain. The dark side is the non-rational animal instinct, based on anger, fear, aggression, and other primal emotions. It is described as being "quick" and "seductive," without the virtues of patience and reason.

A New Hope is in many ways a film about the older generation handing the sword over to a new generation and this happens literally when Obi-Wan gives Luke his father's lightsaber. This is another connection to Luke's past as well as a promise of Luke's future should he fulfill his potential. The lightsaber is a talisman. Unlike most talismans such as the One Ring that has a magical power unto itself, the lightsaber is more a symbol of the Jedi, a reminder of Luke's aspirations and his heritage. For Luke, becoming a Jedi is becoming an adult. To do this, he must leave behind his old life. He must go out to be initiated and discover the light and dark side within himself.

After seeing Princess Leia's message, Obi-Wan asks Luke to travel with him to Alderaan. This is another call to adventure, but Luke balks at leaving his aunt and uncle behind. For all of his dreams of leaving Tatooine, he finds that when given the opportunity, he can't bring himself to go. This is known as the refusal of the call. Campbell says, "What they represent is an impotence to put off the infantile ego, with its sphere of emotional relationships and ideals. One is bound in by the walls of childhood; the father and mother stand as threshold guardians, and the timorous soul, fearful of some punishment, fails to make the passage through the door and come to birth without."[4]

The saga could have just ended right there, but Luke's decision to take the journey is made for him when Imperial troops kill Aunt Beru and Uncle Owen, giving him no other choice but to leave the planet with Obi-Wan. His family's death is the first of many separations Luke must experience over the course of his journey. It is painful, but necessary in order for Luke to take his first significant step forward.

His next trial is when he enters the shadow world of Mos Eisley. It's a place rife with danger from the Empire and from the rough characters who inhabit the town. Luke enters the literal underworld of the cantina on a staircase leading down, although at this point he is an innocent and still needs Obi-Wan's protection from the cantina patrons. It is here they encounter new companions, Han Solo and Chewbacca. Chewbacca is the classic loyal sidekick and instantly we know he is a character Luke can trust. Han is more comfortable in the shady surroundings of the cantina and his costume even reflects moral ambiguity with black, dark blue, and white.

When Luke leaves Tatooine with his new companions, he still needs Obi-Wan's guidance as well as the protection of Han and Chewbacca. Luke may be an able pilot, but in the "larger world" into which he has made his first steps, he is a neophyte. Luke relies upon others until he discovers the princess is being

held captive aboard the Death Star. For the first time since leaving home, he takes the initiative in his adventure. He persuades a skeptical Han Solo and Chewbacca to join him and plan the rescue. This leads to his next trial, rescuing the princess and escaping the Death Star. The rescue and escape are fraught with setbacks, dangers, and overcoming impossible odds, but because this new fellowship of sorts works so well together, they are able to succeed. This entire sequence builds the strong friendship among the four characters. But it is not without cost. Luke experiences the loss of his new father figure Obi-Wan, who dies battling Darth Vader. Obi-Wan sacrifices himself to save Luke and his friends.

Luke's final trial in *A New Hope* is the attack on the Death Star. Once again he experiences separation. He is without most of his new friends and many of his fellow pilots perish in the battle, including his old friend Biggs. Artoo is damaged and Luke's targeting computer isn't working. Here he must put faith in his own abilities. Even though Obi-Wan's voice gently guides him and even though Han Solo helps him at the last minute by clearing the way for Luke to destroy the Death Star, it's ultimately up to Luke to accomplish the task.

A New Hope tests Luke's worthiness of becoming a Jedi. Various situations, like rescuing Princess Leia from the detention block, destroying TIE fighters in pursuit, or participating in an attack on the Death Star, test Luke's bravery and belief in himself. For if he lets fear and self-doubt interfere, he succumbs to the animal instinct. It would be easy for him to be irresponsible, to give up, and turn away from his goal of knighthood.

By the end of *A New Hope*, Luke endures danger as well as the pain of separation and of loss. However, Obi-Wan remains a guiding force. He advises Luke as he attacks the Death Star, and Luke sees his spectral form in the next two films.

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Otherwise, Luke is not completely alone on his path. Adolescents often use their peers as family. Luke's friends give him help and encouragement, but they can also be seen as physical manifestations of his personality. For example, Han Solo represents the thrill-seeking, free, and rebellious side. Threepio is a comical caricature of Luke's fears and self-doubts. Princess Leia, who is Luke's twin sister, represents Luke's anima, the "unconscious contrasexual side of the male psyche," according to Steven Gallipeau's glossary in *The Journey of Luke Skywalker*.[5]

As the only main female character in Episodes IV-VI, Leia serves as what Carl Jung called "the archetype of life" and "the archetype of all divine mothers."[6] Her maternality is manifested through her high position in society and in the Alliance's leadership hierarchy. She represents the fullest extent of what Luke could be: confident, powerful, compassionate, and just. As his anima, she motivates him throughout *A New Hope*. Her message encourages him to seek out Obi-Wan. Her presence on the Death Star allows him to truly prove himself for the first time. She comforts him and brings him back to the moment after Obi-Wan dies, and it is for her cause he risks his life in battling the Death Star.

The most important relationship, however, is the relationship between Luke and Darth Vader, which is addressed for the first time in *The Empire Strikes Back*. This chapter in the saga tests Luke as he has never been tested before. As Vader tells him, "Obi-Wan has trained you well…but you are not a Jedi yet."

Luke's faces his first trial at the very beginning of the film when he is attacked by the Wampa creature and taken back to its cave. The audience realizes very quickly that despite Luke's triumphs in *A New Hope*, his improved skills with a lightsaber, and his increased use of the Force, he is humbled by the shadow creature of a hostile world, which he barely manages to escape. The spirit of Obi-Wan appears to him to seek further training from Yoda, indicating he has far to go in his journey to become a Jedi and a man. It is up to Han to assist him and save his life when he is stranded out in the frozen wasteland. Luke still needs the guidance and protection of others.

His next trial occurs during the Empire's attack on the Alliance's base. Luke loses his gunner in the attack, crashes, and nearly loses his life. He is able to heroically bring down some of the AT-ATs but the most he has been able to accomplish in this battle is delay the Empire long enough for his friends to escape. He then endures the separation from his new family as he goes on to Dagobah while his friends flee the Empire.

On Dagobah, Luke endures his next test when he first encounters Yoda. The diminutive Jedi Master comes across as a nuisance, ransacking through Luke's belongings, fighting with Artoo, and otherwise pushing Luke's patience. Not surprisingly, Yoda recognizes some of the Skywalker temper present in Luke and it takes some urging from Obi-Wan's spirit before Yoda agrees to train him. The short training scenes reveal that the physical training is arduous, pushing Luke to his limits. But nothing is more difficult for Luke than the spiritual challenges he faces on Dagobah because for the first time, Luke realizes his own potential for evil.

Yoda tells Luke to go inside the cave that is with the Dark Side. This is Luke's journey into the subconscious. The entire scene has a nightmare-like quality to it, shot in slow-motion. There he encounters Vader, a figure representing all that is evil and irrational: fear, anger, and aggression. A lightsaber duel ensues, and Luke decapitates Vader. The mask pops off the severed head and Luke sees his own face staring back at him. Not only is it clue for the revelation later in the film, it's a warning of what Luke could become if he is not wary.

As difficult as his time is on Dagobah, Luke gains another father figure in Yoda. Yoda provides guidance, wisdom, a link to Luke's past, and the key to Luke becoming a Jedi. He is the first one to teach Luke to use one's own power judiciously.

The visions Luke experiences on Dagobah of his friends' suffering lead him to his next trial. Yoda and Obi-Wan advise him not to go but they leave the decision up to Luke.

Luke walks into a trap at Cloud City, forcing him into a confrontation with the man he believes killed his father and killed Obi-Wan. But, Vader reveals he is Luke's biological father. The vision he had of what his father was turns out to be false. This is another painful loss for Luke. The horrifying separation of his hand from his body by the father – the hand holding Anakin's lightsaber! – visually expresses this soul-rending pain. He must accept now that his father is alive and evil. He must also accept that a mentor he trusted deeply, Obi-Wan, lied to him. Even with the weight of events, Luke makes one final decision, a likely death over the false promises of power from Vader. From this moment on, Luke must again rely on the protection of others, specifically his friends.

The Empire Strikes Back is Luke's major initiation through pain and loss of innocence. He experiences demanding training under Yoda, he is separated from his friends, his close friend is captured and frozen in carbonite, he learns his archenemy is his father, the Alliance loses its base to the Empire, and he loses his hand while fighting Vader. In Gracia Fay Ellwood's essay on the plots of Romance, the Descent

"means increasing loss of identity: loss of relationships, especially with parents and beloved; fear, suffering, often imprisonment – becoming an object."[7] This film marks the beginning of Luke's descent.

The loss of Luke's hand has more than one implication. It has been described as a symbolic castration.[8] In many societies, circumcision is a form of symbolic castration. By enduring the pain and resisting the fear of true castration, the adolescent becomes a man. Luke takes further steps to becoming a Jedi by resisting fear and not turning away from his quest in spite of all the bad things that happen to him.

Luke receives a mechanical hand to replace the one that was cut off. This symbolizes that Darth Vader, who is "more machine than man" is a part of Luke and Vader's capacity for evil is Luke's as well. At the same time, Luke also realizes the goodness in himself must still exist in his father. After all, if Vader was absolutely evil, how could there be any good in his son? The audience realizes this ember of goodness too, since he resisted the idea of executing Leia in *A New Hope* and convinces the Emperor to spare Luke's life in *The Empire Strikes Back*. Vader's subdued reaction to his son's escape in Empire also indicates the facade of evil has perhaps begun to crack.

When Luke first appears in *Return of the Jedi*, he is dressed in a dark cloak and the audience notes his demeanor has changed since we last saw him in *The Empire Strikes Back*. He seems mature, self-assured, calm, and very Jedi-like. He bravely enters another shadow world, Jabba the Hutt's palace, to help rescue Han Solo. Luke in this sequence acts without doubt or fear, even when most of his friends have been captured and he is faced with seeing a scantily-clad Leia chained to Jabba. When Jabba drops him into the rancor pit, Luke successfully defeats the beast, even when victory means having to be a captive for a time. Jabba brings his prisoners out of the shadow world and into the light, and finally Luke is able to act. The heroes destroy Jabba and his minions and lose their enemy Boba Fett in the process. Luke is ready for knighthood.

Or is he? The very first thing Luke does when confronted with the Gamorrean guards inside Jabba's stronghold is strangle them with the Force until they stand down. Luke also threatens Jabba more than once with lines like, "You will be destroyed" and "Free us or die." When the film was originally released, one would not have thought much of this behavior. After all, Luke is a hero. But the prequels have shown that none of the other Jedi – Obi-Wan, Yoda, Mace Windu, Qui-Gon Jinn – strangle or threaten anyone even under the most dire of circumstances. The only character we've seen act this way is Darth Vader. Luke is dressed head to toe in black and after his prosthetic hand is shot, he covers up the injury with a black leather glove. This is a reminder that Luke is still vulnerable to his own potential for evil and he has yet to surmount the one obstacle to knighthood, confronting Vader.

Yoda tells him as much when Luke visits him on Dagobah. Yoda confirms that Vader told him the truth about his parentage in *The Empire Strikes Back*. This revelation inspires hope but it also inspires new fears and doubts in Luke's mind. Before Yoda dies in *Return of the Jedi*, he tells Luke he must confront his father if he is to become a Jedi. This is his final trial. The ghostly form of Obi-Wan tells him the same thing. Luke says, "I can't kill my own father," although no one actually tells him he must kill Vader.

Luke tends to gain substitute father figures throughout his quest, but they die off as Luke gets closer to discovering his true father, and himself. Suffering the loss of so many weighs on Luke and he may not be able to survive emotionally losing the father he'd long ago admired.

For Luke, this confrontation with Vader is the ultimate test. He must not let his fears of his own death, parricide, and failure prevent him from facing the Dark Lord. Hamlet had a similar problem with

confronting and killing Claudius, his uncle and step-father, and his procrastination had disastrous results. If Luke is to pass this trial, he must go alone into the netherworld.

Once Luke realizes he cannot put off this confrontation any longer, he leaves his friends behind on Endor and surrenders to the Imperials. He confronts Vader again and not only does he acknowledge Vader as his father, he asks Vader to reject evil and repent. Vader refuses, saying almost sadly, "It is too late for me, son." Luke is then taken to the Emperor's throne room in the Death Star. It is the center of evil in the universe despite its spartan and modern setting. The room is mostly dark and shadowy. It is the final descent into the netherworld for Luke.

The Emperor does his best to get Luke to submit to anger, fear, and aggression by taunting and goading him with threats. Luke resists until the Emperor reveals he tricked the Alliance into thinking the "fully armed and operational" Death Star was unable to defend itself. Luke loses his temper, retrieves his lightsaber, and begins fighting Vader, who remains the Emperor's loyal slave. Luke regains his calm temporarily, until Vader discovers he has a daughter and threatens to turn her over to the Dark Side.

This threat exposes Luke's greatest vulnerability, his love for his sister. He sees this as a violation against his own anima, against everything that is pure and life-giving. He flies at Vader in a fury. This time, Luke does the maiming when he chops off Vader's mechanical hand. Luke looks at his own mechanical hand, ensconced in a black glove, and realizes he has given in to anger and fear. At last it hits Luke that he is just a lightsaber stroke away from taking Vader's place at the Emperor's side.

The Emperor encourages Luke to kill Vader, but Luke tosses away his lightsaber. "No...I am a Jedi, like my father before me," he tells the Emperor. Luke chooses life over death, compassion over revenge, the greater good over his own emotions. It is at this moment, he truly becomes a Jedi. He has fully realized the darkness within himself and he has the confidence to keep it under control, even in the face of fear, anger, and death.

The Emperor reacts to this with fury and tries to kill Luke. But Vader is inspired by his son's maturation. He is reminded of what he had been and what he could have become had his choices been different. Undoubtedly, a latent love for his wife Padmé influenced him as well. Vader learns from Luke that he is not only able to make choices, he also has the freedom to act upon them. He seizes the Emperor and kills him but not without becoming mortally wounded.

Vader asks Luke to remove the dark mask, the facade of evil, to reveal his true self. Vader then dies, but it is the final separation Luke experiences. He has helped his father re-discover himself, and he has learned that he is strong enough to resist the Dark Side. The funeral pyre scene is symbolic, not only of Anakin's spirit being freed for good, but also of Luke leaving behind the last vestiges of his adolescent fears and anxieties. *Return of the Jedi* is mostly about Anakin's redemption but it is also about Luke finally becoming his own man. His independence is stressed throughout the film, from his mode of dress to the lightsaber he crafted himself to the way he always made his own choices, whether it's rescuing Han, redeeming his father, or rejecting Palpatine's temptations to give into anger. It is his ability to make his own choices and act upon them, along with his love, that finally inspires the Chosen One to fulfill his prophecy.

Now, Luke is allowed to rejoin the new family structure and his community. The final scenes of *Return of the Jedi* resemble a family reunion. Not only is Luke reunited with his sister and his friends, the father figures of Yoda, Obi-Wan, and Anakin are all present as well, forever a part of Luke's psyche and his heart. This scene symbolizes his return to the family after passing initiation and gaining a new identity.

It also symbolizes the unity and maturity of all facets of Luke's personality. Leia blossoms into a woman, almost an earth-mother type figure by the end, while Han rejects his selfish and cynical ways to finally believe in something bigger than himself.
To become an adult, one must experience many painful separations and tests. You must come to know the bad as well as the good inside yourself, the creative as well as the destructive. The evil will not "go away." The darkness must exist for there to be light, so that you realize the difference between them. You must not be afraid to confront this dark side, although the temptation to hide from it may be hard to resist. You must face up to the responsibility, or the journey will never be completed.

Luke accepts the tests and separations bravely, and he fights his fears and doubts. He comes to know his own goodness and darkness, and through that, he completes the journey successfully.

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The Way of the Jedi: a Comparison of the Jedi Order to the Japanese Samurai

by Reihla

Most die-hard *Star Wars* fans have spent their share of time thinking about the premise behind the creation of George Lucas's Jedi Order. Intentional or not, I believe the Jedi bear more than a passing resemblance to many medieval military orders. The argument is often presented that the Jedi were patterned after the samurai warriors of Japan. I believe that while the two orders share many traits, there are significant differences as well. This paper will explore these traits and provide a realistic look at which characteristics they have in common as well as the ones that set them apart.

We aren't told much in the *Star Wars* films about the origins of the Jedi Order. What little we do know is summarized in the words of Jedi Master Obi-Wan Kenobi: "For over a thousand generations, the Jedi were the guardians of peace and justice in the Old Republic."[1] Over two full decades later, when Lucas introduced the prequel trilogy, that same early ideal was reaffirmed by the glimpses we were given into the Jedi lifestyle and purpose. To further confirm the original role of the Jedi we need only listen to Master Mace Windu succinctly describe the order as "keepers of the peace, not soldiers."[2] From these references it is easy to assume that the Jedi are devoted to the elimination of conflict through non-confrontational means.

In contrast, the samurai were strictly a warrior class, finding their origins from the highest of the four Japanese social classes: samurai, farmers, craftspeople, and traders.[3] In a medieval Japan marked by civil war, the feudalist government consisted, in simple terms, of a shogun that ruled over the daimyo, his provincial lords. To preserve order and assist with tax collection, the daimyo hired numerous samurai. In exchange for their services and unwavering loyalty, the samurai were given wealth and lands. Later on, their purpose evolved from peacekeeping to protecting the interests of the daimyo and serving in regional military coalitions.[4]

While feudalism doesn't translate directly into Lucas's galaxy far, far away, there are some similarities in social structure between medieval Japan and the world of the Jedi. Both the Jedi and the samurai are widely respected, with common citizens often seeking them out for assistance. It is obvious that both orders serve the greater good of their governing bodies, the Jedi through their own Council to the Republic and the samurai to the shogunate through the daimyo.

Initially, at least, the samurai purpose – the preservation of order – seemed to coincide with that of the Jedi. Their methods, however, tend to set them apart in that the samurai were far more militaristic. It was rare that the samurai were called upon to attempt negotiation before employing more violent methods.

Despite the best intentions of the Jedi, in Lucas's fictional galaxy their preferred pacifist tactics often failed to achieve the desired results. At times like these we see the warrior side of the Jedi emerge. As skilled swordsmen, they are capable of gaining victory over numerous armed opponents using only their lightsabers. Although they prefer more peaceful means of conflict resolution, they do not hesitate to proceed to "aggressive negotiations" by using exceptional swordsmanship to get their point across.[5]

Although they prefer more peaceful means of conflict resolution, [Jedi] do not hesitate to proceed to "aggressive negotiations" by using exceptional swordsmanship to get their point across.

In addition to their extraordinary hand-to-hand combat skills, the Jedi possess a strong spiritual side. They are followers of the Force, which is defined in the *Star Wars* universe as a mystical energy field that wraps around all living beings. The Force imbues a Jedi with a number of psychic powers: telepathy, which can be used to exercise a measure of control over those who are weak minded, and telekinesis, to maneuver their physical surroundings. These talents serve them well in many situations, from negotiation to dueling and from piloting to command.

Unlike the fictional Jedi, the samurai were not known telepaths, however, they too possessed a strong spiritual side. As an order, they had no specific religion by which they defined themselves, but by the latter middle ages the majority were practitioners of Zen Buddhism.[6] Like the Jedi, they spent a great deal of time meditating at the temple, the main philosophical difference being that the Jedi are seekers of peace, whereas the samurai sought enlightenment and discipline.

Regardless of their individual religious practices, all samurai followed a collection of guidelines for behavior known as the bushido code . Adherence to bushido "the way of the warrior" meant a samurai had to be willing to die to protect his daimyo. It is worth noting that most considered themselves dead already.[7] This attitude suited them well, as they were required to do anything their lord asked, including enter mortal combat at a moment's notice. Such loyalty towards one's lord was the foundation of bushido.[8] This single-minded loyalty and willingness to die for duty are definitely traits the samurai and Jedi share. In fact, the characteristics are hallmarks of the Jedi Order throughout the *Star Wars* saga.

One particular samurai, Yamamoto Tsunetomo (1659-1719), scribed a collection of thoughts throughout his lifetime that is still considered an authoritative source on the philosophies of the medieval samurai. Many times in his work, the *Hagakure*, Yamamoto implores, "Be true to the thought of the moment and avoid distraction."[9] This phrase, is strikingly similar to the words spoken by Qui-Gon Jinn in Episode I, when he urges Obi-Wan to "Keep your concentration here and now."[10] The same philosophy is evident in Master Yoda when he almost refused to train Luke Skywalker because "all his life he has looked away to the future. Never his mind on where he was. What he was doing."[11]

Those instances are just few of many wonderful parallels that can be drawn from Yamamoto's tenets. Another fine example can be found in the phrase: "Even a person who is good for nothing and exceedingly clumsy will be a reliable retainer if only he has the determination to think earnestly of his master."[12] That quote does much to sum up Qui-Gon's attitude towards the awkward character of Jar Jar Binks. It could also explain his askance look at Obi-Wan when the latter refers to Jar Jar as "another pathetic life form."[13]

Perhaps the most intriguing coincidence between the samurai and the Jedi is the concept of the Force. Obi-Wan Kenobi explains the Force as the thing that gives a Jedi his power: "It's an energy field created by all living beings. It surrounds us and penetrates us; it binds the galaxy together." The samurai also acknowledge a mystical life energy, the ki (or qi, or chi). They drew on it for strength and used it for a variety of purposes, including healing.[14]

Although this concept of a mystical energy field is one that both Jedi and samurai share, their reliance upon it differs in one key area. Mystical life energy has nothing to do with how someone becomes a samurai. Samurai are born to their position through wealth and station. In between times of military service, they married, raised families and owned lands. In contrast, a Jedi candidate had to possess latent Force using abilities as well as the quantifiable physical characteristic of a high midi-chlorian count (determined by blood test) to be accepted into the order. Once accepted, they were denied all contact with their natural families and taught that possession and attachment were forbidden.[15]

Another fascinating coincidence between the samurai and the Jedi is their choice of weaponry and the extensive training required to gain proficiency in its use. Both orders selected elegant swords that were so unique and finely crafted as to be outside the purview of the average citizen. We learn through young Anakin Skywalker's observations in Episode I that "only Jedi carry that kind of weapon." Most likely this was true as each lightsaber was crafted by its owner.

For the samurai, the daisho, a pair of gracefully curved swords made by master craftsmen, were the weapons of choice. The shorter of the two blades was known as the dai-to, or wakizashi, and the longer blade was the sho-to, or katana.[16] So honored were these weapons that in 1587 shogun Hideyoshi decreed that only samurai would be allowed to carry the daisho. This restriction succeeded in making the sword pair a universal symbol for the samurai.[17] The same phenomenon holds true of the lightsaber, even though such a weapon doesn't exist outside of fiction. In today's society, one can't see a laser sword or hear its characteristic hum without thinking of *Star Wars* and Jedi Knights.

It is also worth mentioning the strong similarities between traditional garb of the Jedi and the samurai. Both are comprised of several tunics of various materials arranged in layers across the wearer's chest and then bound by a cloth waistband. The Jedi garb so obviously resembles the historical Japanese kamishimo sugata that the influence of the traditional samurai garb on Lucas's costume designers cannot be ignored.[18]

The final comparison between these two orders – that of their decline – has yet to be seen. The Jedi are destined to fall, as any *Star Wars* fan surely knows, but the method of their destruction has not yet come to light. We are given hints throughout the *Star Wars* films that pride, arrogance and overconfidence among the leadership are at least partly to blame. We also know that evil Sith warriors, corrupt Force users, will have a hand in eradicating the Order. These things will be confirmed or not when Episode III: *Revenge of the Sith* is released in theaters in 2005.

If rumors are true, there is one thing we can be fairly certain of at this point. The downfall of the samurai does not mirror that of the Jedi in that it was not due to war or conflict. In fact, if anything, peace made the samurai obsolete. The last shogun resigned his leadership in 1867 and the Emperor was installed as Japan's formal leader. Ultimately the Emperor purchased the lands of the daimyo and even went so far as to ban the samurai from carrying their swords. In 1877, Saigo Takamori, one of the last samurai, led a small group of warriors in open rebellion against the might of the Emperor's forces. Before the final battle, however, Takamori realized the odds were insurmountable and committed ritual suicide rather than sacrifice what remained of his forces and submit to capture.[19]

This act of seppuku, ritual suicide, was commonplace among samurai defeated on the field of battle. It is something we do not see in the Jedi Order. No matter how grave the odds against them, the Jedi seem to prefer living to fight another day. Even so, there is one aspect of death the samurai and the Jedi have in common. Another samurai philosopher, Miyamoto Musashi, once wrote, "generally speaking, the Way of the Warrior is the resolute acceptance of death."[20] Those words ring true many times in *Star Wars* films, most notably with the deaths of four prominent Jedi: Qui-Gon Jinn, Yoda, Obi-Wan Kenobi and even the redeemed Anakin Skywalker. None of these Jedi feared death when it came to them. Indeed, they all faced it bravely, as true and honorable warriors.

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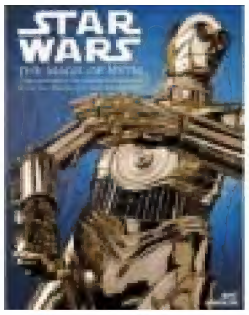
Recommendation
Beginning the Journey



Title: Star Wars: The Magic of Myth
Author: Mary Henderson
ISBN: 0-553-10206-0; paperback 0-553-37810-4
Publisher: Bantam
Copyright: 1997

Reviewed by FernWithy.

The Magic of Myth, Mary Henderson's companion volume to exhibit of the same name at the Smithsonian Institute's NASA Museum, is the best starting point available for someone new to the mythological aspects of the classic *Star Wars* trilogy.

The book is separated into three sections. "*Star Wars* and Classic Mythology" compares Luke Skywalker's story with the traditional stories by which Lucas was influenced (including King Arthur, Siegfried, the *Odyssey*, *The Divine Comedy*, and others), and "The Makings of Modern Myth" looks at more modern influences (including cowboys, the second world war, technological horror, and more). The final section, "Mythic Images," studies how Lucas used visual imagery to evoke these archetypes.

As an introduction to the *Star Wars* mythology, *Magic of Myth* is fantastic. Unlike many books on the subject, it presupposes no knowledge of the comparative subject matter, and gives succinct explanations of its references. Henderson walks readers through the traditional stories, historical references, and theoretical work without ever becoming overbearing, including a good overview of the work of mythologist Joseph Campbell, whose ideas had a profound influence on Lucas's work. The chapter taking us through the Hero's Journey portrays not only Luke's journey, but its analogues in myth – the guarded thresholds, the mentors' gifts, the refusals of adventure. The studies of visual imagery are fantastic, breaking down why choices were made and what they meant to evoke, including pictures both of the *Star Wars* props and costumes and the historical costumes which inspired them. The large, full-color pictures allow the reader to see how well those choices work.

Henderson's book is introductory and doesn't explore the many issues it raises in great depth, but hey...that leaves room for the rest of us.

Discovering *Star Wars*

ami-padme

My father is a huge *Star Wars* fan, so Episodes IV and V simply always existed as far as I knew; showing on television, soundtracks spinning on the record player, toys lying around the house...It wasn't until the theatrical release of *Return of the Jedi* that the saga broke out of this background, and really made an impact on me. But what an impact!

Jedi is one of the first – if not *the* first – movie I clearly remember seeing in the theaters as a young child, and watching it at the drive-in still ranks as one of my all-time favorite movie-going experiences. The movie itself was instantly one of my favorites, and remains so to this day. Vader saving Luke at the end was quite a revelation; it came as an honest surprise to me that the "bad guy" could still be a good dad to Luke and a blue-ghost friend to undeniable good guys like Yoda and Obi-Wan Kenobi. The rest of the movie – with fighting Ewoks, the frightening Emperor, a Jabba-choking Leia, some action-packed space battles – was thrilling and great fun, and cemented *Star Wars* as my favorite film series.

As an adult, the Special Edition and Prequel Trilogy made me fall in love with the saga all over again, and from some different perspectives. But at the core of my love for *Star Wars* is a four-year-old girl sitting at a drive-in, amazed by a Galaxy Far, Far Away…

FernWithy

Star Wars came out the year I turned seven.

I was living in a small town, and by the time it came to the only movie theater in the county, everyone knew there was something special going on. My mother and I went with another single mother and her son, Jacques. When we got to the theater, the line stretched around the block twice. I'd never seen that many people in Warsaw, New York, at the same time. They let all of us in--the theater was badly oversold. The solution they came up with was that the adults got the seats, and the kids went up to the very front of the theater and sat on the floor. It took up the whole world. It was the biggest, most beautiful thing I'd ever seen. I remember that, riding home, I shoved Jacques aside and told him to "get that big walking carpet out of my way!"

For both *Empire* and *Jedi*, we went into the city for opening weekend, making an event of it. It was *Jedi* that made me a fan for life – the redemption of Anakin Skywalker brought the story home to me. My friends and I started a little SW club and wrote a story about the next generation. We promised to meet up when the rumored prequels arrived, and we kept the promise.

The prequel trilogy revived my love for the saga, particularly for its grand mythic themes, and the undercurrent of compassion and kindness.

lazypadawan

In May 1977, *Star Wars* opened in only one theater in town. Immediately there were huge lines and soon there were reports of people waiting all day to see the movie. My dad came up with the idea of playing hooky from work while my brother and I would be pulled out of school for a "dentist's appointment" on the theory that it would be easier to get into the theater on a weekday.

It worked. Like everyone who first saw the movie back then, I was sold from the moment I saw the Star Destroyer enter the screen. As a fantasy-prone kid who watched horror and sci-fi movies as well as shows like *Star Trek* and *Space 1999*, it was an easy sell. Afterwards, my brother and I couldn't stop talking about it. The first thing we did when we got home was draw all of the characters. *A New Hope* was more than pure entertainment for me; it was an epiphany. From then on, this one film and its progeny would come to be a dominant force in my life for many years afterward.

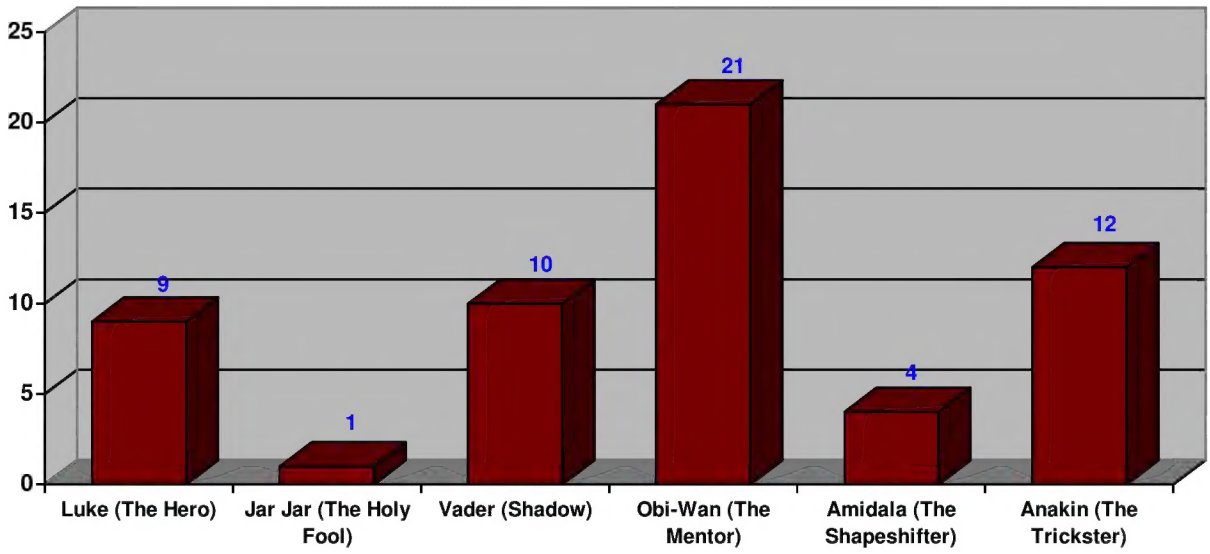
A New Hope made an impression on the world because it was so unique. It introduced a great fantasy world with great characters that you wanted to visit over and over. It was also the starting point of a long personal journey. I've grown with that universe and its characters and that has led to me to many interesting people and experiences.

Reihla

In 1977 I was a nine-year old tomboy. The thing I remember best about my first *Star Wars* experience was the amazing lightsaber. I spent countless hours crafting my own out of clear plastic tubing, a flashlight and lots of duct tape. Of course, I had to make one for a friend so we could duel.

Three years later, when *Empire* was released, I realized there was more to the saga than cool weaponry. My pre-teen imagination was completely captured by that movie – the romance, the action, the revelation that Vader was Luke's father. Fortunately my friends were equally enthralled and we spent weekend after weekend sitting in the new Cinema 6 watching consecutive showings. Just like that we became part of the *Star Wars* fandom. We quoted dialogue line for line. We scribbled characters names and sketches in all of our school notebooks. We bought packs of Topps bubble gum just for the trading cards. We wrote stories about our favorite characters and even made up a few new ones. It was a glorious age to be a *Star Wars* fan.

Then the hype preceding *Revenge of the Jedi* began. Oddly enough, we barely noticed when the title changed to "Return" upon the film's release. This last movie had everything we could've wished for: Luke Skywalker in Jedi black, Han and Leia reunited, Jabba and the Emperor destroyed, and finally, the redemption of Darth Vader. This marvelous conclusion cemented our adoration and we all became fans for life.

Poll Results:

What *Star Wars* Character Represents Your Favorite Archetype?